

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 876

CS 504 849

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TITLE The Speech Communication Methods Course in Secondary
Teacher Preparation Programs in Arkansas.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Reports -
Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT Journal of Communication Studies; v3 n1 p20-24 Oct
1984
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Education Work Relationship; *Graduate Surveys;
Higher Education; *Methods Courses; *Preservice
Teacher Education; Professional Development; *Program
Effectiveness; Secondary School Teachers; *Speech
Communication; *Teacher Education Curriculum;
Vocational Followup
IDENTIFIERS Arkansas

ABSTRACT

A 40-item questionnaire was used to collect data in a study that (1) profiled speech communication education graduates of Arkansas colleges and universities from 1975 through 1980, (2) characterized their teaching positions during this time, and (3) determined the nature, effectiveness, and value of the speech communication methods course they completed while in college. Subjects were 69 speech communication education graduates from one of the selected Arkansas teacher training institutions. Responses revealed that most subjects had earned credit beyond a bachelor's degree, but few had actually attained an advanced degree. Only a small number of respondents belonged to professional speech communication groups at either the state, regional, or national level, and none taught only speech communication. As for the methods course, only 17 of 30 subjects indicated that the class was time well spent, with instruction in course and lesson planning preparation identified as the most helpful units in the course. Finally, respondents felt that methods course instructors spent too much time on professional organizations, behavioral objectives, and current issues in speech communication education. (HOD)

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THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION METHODS COURSE IN SECONDARY
TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN ARKANSAS

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THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION METHODS COURSE IN SECONDARY TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN ARKANSAS

*Ovid L. Bayless and Barbara S. Moody**

Many individuals undoubtedly possess the capability and willingness to judge the adequacy of various teacher education programs. But one well qualified group that is rarely called upon to do so is the graduates themselves.¹ Beginning teachers are well qualified to discuss whether or not a sound and viable relationship exists between their education and training and their teaching duties. Consequently, this investigation attempted to gather data to describe what young teachers had to say about their own professional qualifications, the attributes of their instructional positions, and the content of their "methods" course.

This study attempted (1) to profile speech communication education graduates of Arkansas colleges and universities from 1975 through 1980, (2) to characterize their teaching positions during this time, and (3) to determine the nature, effectiveness, and value of the speech communication methods course they completed while in college. This particular course was chosen since it draws from the various areas of the speech communication discipline and culminates four years of instruction, drawing on knowledge gained in communication studies, theatre, and related activities.

Though these data have been compiled from a small sample and from a limited geographical area, the results may be of value to those people responsible for planning and teaching the speech communication methods course. As Marceline Erickson noted:

We must do our own 'soul searching': See wherein we are strong and wherein we are weak; and when we know what the situation relating to our preparation of speech teachers for the secondary school actually is, we should pool our best thinking to improve it.²

Perhaps this study will contribute information that will be helpful in the assessment of the preparation of speech communication teachers for the secondary school.

LITERATURE

A number of scholars³ have examined the undergraduate speech communication teacher preparation program. Two studies in particular dealt with the speech communication methods course. In 1971 Ronald L. and Susan J. Applbaum published their descriptive study of the "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Speech Methods Course in College." Two years later Jerry D. Blanche's study became available; it was entitled "An Evaluation of Speech Methods Courses in Secondary Teacher Preparation Programs of State-Supported Colleges and Universities in Missouri."

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The Applbaums' study, conducted in California, collected data from 460 teachers; 48.6% had completed a methods course. The following five areas provided the greatest practical value: 1) planning classroom activities, 2) evaluating students and materials, 3) handling interpersonal relationships, 4) developing a forensics program, and 5) practice in teaching. They found the major weaknesses were 1) failure to make the course practical, 2) unqualified instructors, i.e. no recent experience in the high school classroom, 3) failure to account for the low achiever and culturally disadvantaged, and 4) failure to examine the overall course organization.⁴

Blanche compiled information from 143 Missouri teachers. He found only 18.4 percent taught speech communication courses exclusively; most had either theatre or English teaching responsibilities in addition to those in speech communication. Approximately sixty-six percent of the subjects considered their speech communication methods course as "adequate" or better in effectiveness. The course that rated "highest" was the one that had a balance in participation between the students and the teacher, and the one that had a more practical foundation, rather than one that was more theoretical in nature.⁵

METHOD

This study used a forty-item questionnaire to collect data. Twenty-nine of the questions were identical to those Blanche used in his investigation. The authors pre-tested the questionnaire, using eight graduate students, five of whom held undergraduate degrees in speech communication and theatre education. The questionnaire required approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Based upon the responses to the pre-test questionnaire the authors revised the survey instrument to achieve greater clarity, which also resulted in less time required to complete the questionnaire.

Subjects for the investigation were people who had graduated with a speech communication education degree from one of the selected teacher training institutions⁶ in the state of Arkansas during the period between 1975 and 1980. The authors assumed it would be difficult for people to recall information from their speech communication methods course prior to 1975; hence, the rationale for the specified time period. Moreover, the authors wanted data from only those persons who had been certified to teach and had actually taught (exclusive of student teaching).

All colleges and universities within the state that offered a speech communication education degree were contacted in order to obtain a list of graduates from the 1975-1980 time period. All of the institutions willingly assisted by providing lists of their graduates. They submitted 179 names that were cross-checked for certification and mailing address against records on file in the state Department of Education. Certification verification and mailing addresses were located for 147 people, which formed the initial survey list. Questionnaires were mailed to these individuals in July, 1981. Twenty-six were returned and marked "no forwarding address available," reducing the number to 121. A follow-up questionnaire was sent in September, 1981 to those people who had not responded.⁷

RESULTS

Questionnaires Returned

Of the 121 subjects who received the questionnaire, sixty-nine responded, which represented fifty-seven percent of the sample. These responses were divided into two groups: (1) the target group that consisted of thirty-three people ($N = 33$) or 27.27 percent sample from the original pool; (2) the group that for one reason or another failed to meet the criteria established earlier in the research design, i.e. had not been certified, had not completed a speech communication

methods course, or had not taught in a secondary school since graduation.

Profile of Respondents

The results revealed that 84 percent of the respondents had attained additional education since receiving their bachelor's degree; eighteen percent had obtained a master's degree. Ninety-six percent of the people who replied had taught in the secondary school for one year or more and twenty, representing sixty percent, were currently teaching at the time they completed the questionnaire. Few of the respondents belonged to a professional speech communication association: three (nine percent) belonged to the Speech Communication Association (SCA); two (six percent) to the Southern SCA, and five (fifteen percent) to the Arkansas SCA. A larger number of the respondents belonged to the National Education Association, i.e. twelve or thirty-six percent.

Characteristics of Teaching Positions

None of the respondents taught speech communication courses exclusively. The speech communication and English combination was most common (57.6%), followed closely by dramatic arts (54.5%), then social studies, a distant third (18.2%), with reading (6%) and math (3%) mentioned by two people and one person respectively. Most of the schools where the respondents were employed started offering the first speech communication class in either the ninth (32.1%), tenth (17.9%), or eleventh (21.4%) grade. A number of the schools (fourteen) offered only one course, usually worth one credit.

Speech Communication Methods Course

Table 1 provides a list of subject areas or units commonly taught and the rank and the percentage of methods courses that contained these particular topics as a part of the course content; the majority of the methods courses completed by respondents in this study covered identical units of instruction. The behavioral objectives area was most frequently included, with 93.3 percent of the respondents indicating that they received instruction on behavioral objectives. Three areas had a response of 83.3 percent: (1) lesson plans, (2) course planning, and (3) evaluating speeches. Only the public relations area received mention in less than fifty percent of the responses.

TABLE 1 (see back page for larger print)

Topics Covered in Speech Communication
Methods Courses

Topics	Rank	Percentage of Total Population	Topics	Rank	Percentage of Total Population
Behavioral Objectives	1	93.3	Oral Interpretation	12	70.0
Lesson Plans	2	83.3	Professional Organizations	12	70.0
Course Planning	2	83.3	Communication Theory	17	63.3
Evaluating Speeches	2	83.3	Choosing a Text	17	63.3
Public Speaking	5	80.0	Classroom Management	17	63.3
Grading	6	76.7	Techniques of Instruction	17	63.3
Group Discussion	6	76.7	Learning Principles	21	60.0
Debate	6	76.7	Test Construction	21	60.0
Instructional Resources	9	73.3	Audio-Visual Aids	21	60.0
Classroom Activities	9	73.3	Directing Theatre Programs	21	60.0
Voice and Diction	9	73.3	Interaction Analysis	25	50.0
Directing Forensics	12	70.0	Public Relations	26	40.0
Current Issues in Speech	12	70.0	Other	27	7.0
Persuasion	12	70.0			

The questionnaire also asked each person to identify the three most helpful and the three least helpful topics or units of instruction without regard to priority.

Sixteen individuals identified "course planning" as the most helpful unit; fourteen chose "lesson plans" as most helpful. "Evaluating speeches," "public speaking," and "oral interpretation" tied for third place in the rankings: thirteen people selected these three units as most beneficial.

The subjects identified the two least helpful units of instruction as "behavioral objectives" and "professional speech communication organizations." These units tied for the top ranking, with six people selecting each topic. The other units of instruction noted as least helpful were "current issues in speech communication," which ranked third and three other topics, i.e. "interaction analysis," "communication theory," and "classroom management," which each received three responses for least helpful area.

The respondents also identified the subject areas they felt needed more class time. Eleven people indicated that "directing theatre programs" was an area that needed more emphasis in the methods classroom. Almost as many people (ten) acknowledged that "classroom activities" needed more time; it ranked second. "Techniques of instruction," "directing forensics," "instructional resources," and "evaluating speeches" tied for third place (nine responses each).

In identifying units of instruction that needed less class time, the subjects chose areas very sparingly, suggesting a reluctance on the part of individuals to criticize their course with any specificity. "Learning principles" and "grading" ranked first, each noted four times. "Current issues in speech communication" was selected by three people and ranked third. "Choosing a text," "communication theory," "professional speech communication organizations," "group discussion," "course planning," and "lesson plans" each were mentioned twice.

The respondents also noted units that could be omitted from the course entirely. Here too the subjects appeared either reluctant to identify precise areas, or perhaps they believed most topics covered in their course were appropriate. Any discernable trends were difficult to identify; "behavioral objectives" ranked first and "interaction analysis" ranked second. Six individuals acknowledged six other areas that could be omitted from the course: (1) public relations, (2) learning principles, (3) choosing a text, (4) classroom management, (5) current issues in speech communication, and (6) voice and diction.

In assessing the overall value of the course in terms of whether the class was time well spent, the response was not one of overwhelming endorsement. Three subjects failed to respond to the question, but of the thirty subjects who did, only seventeen acknowledged that it was time well spent. If one assumes that twenty-five percent of the respondents would indicate that the class was not time well spent, regardless of its content, the lack of a favorable response still remains excessive. The number of subjects who indicated the time was not well spent was significant. A chi square test reveals statistical significance in terms of the number of people not favorable toward the course ($X^2 = 4.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). See Table 2.

TABLE 2

Time Well Spent in Methods Course
Chi Square Analysis

	Time Well Spent	Time Not Well Spent
Observed	17	13
Expected	22	8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Though most subjects had earned credit beyond a bachelor's degree, the fact that few had actually attained an advanced degree suggests that most school districts place little emphasis on their teachers obtaining a graduate degree. That only a small number of respondents belonged to professional speech communication groups at either the state, regional, or national level suggests that school districts place low priority on their teachers belonging to professional associations and/or that these organizations offer little incentive for secondary school teachers to join.

The fact that none of the subjects taught only speech communication indicates that the public schools do not place a high priority on speech communication as an area of study. The data strongly suggest that a speech communication teacher seeking employment in the secondary school should be certified in a second area and should be prepared to teach in that area for at least half the time. The fact that a number of schools offered a course worth one full credit indicates that some school districts recognize the importance of speech communication studies as a part of their curricula.

As for the methods course, the fact that only seventeen of thirty (56.6%) subjects indicated that the class was time well spent suggests that course planners can strengthen the course. The fact that instruction in course and lesson planning preparation were identified as the most helpful units in the course suggests strongly that these units should remain in the course. That methods course instructors spent too much time on professional organizations, behavioral objectives, and current issues in speech communication education indicate that methods course planners should reallocate time from these units to those in the techniques of instruction, classroom activities, directing theatre programs, and directing forensics activities, which received too little emphasis.

NOTES (see back page for larger print)

¹Edgar Beaty, "Follow-up of Teacher Education Graduates as a Basis for Institutional Improvement," *Peabody Journal of Education*, 46 (March, 1969), 298.

²Marceline Erickson, "Undergraduate Course in Preparation in Colleges and Universities of the Central States for Prospective Teachers of Speech in the Secondary Schools," *The Speech Teacher*, 12 (November, 1963), 308.

³For example, see William D. Brooks, "The Status of Speech in Secondary Schools: A Summary of State Studies," *The Speech Teacher*, 18 (November, 1969); Kenneth Burns, "A Report on Teacher Training in Speech," *The Speech Teacher*, 9 (September, 1969); Donald N. Dedmon and Jay G. Criche, "The 'Methods' Course in the Teaching of Speech in the Secondary Schools: Report of a Survey," *Western Speech*, 33 (Spring, 1969); Arthur A. Eisenstadt and Ruth G. Arnold, "Speech Education in New Jersey: A Statewide Survey," *The Speech Teacher*, 6 (September, 1957); Evelyn Koringsberg, Rupert L. Cortright, Oliver W. Nelson, and Karl F. Robinson, "Principles and Standards for the Certification of Teachers of Speech in Secondary Schools," *The Speech Teacher*, 12 (November, 1963); Jan Timmons and Kim Griffin, "Requirements for Teachers of Speech in the Secondary Schools of the United States," *The Speech Teacher*, 13 (March, 1964); Dorothy Yaws and E. L. Pross, "A Survey of Speech Certification Requirements," *Southern Speech Journal*, 18 (December, 1952); Joint Task Force of the Speech Communication Association and American Theatre Association, "Guidelines for Speech Communication and Theatre Programs in Teacher Education," *The Speech Teacher*, 24 (November, 1975).

⁴Ronald L. and Susan J. Applbaum, "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Speech Methods Course in College," *Today's Speech*, 19 (Summer, 1971), 41-44.

⁵Jerry D. Blanche, "An Evaluation of Speech Methods Courses in Secondary Teacher Preparation Programs of State Supported Colleges and Universities in Missouri," Diss. Univ. of Missouri, 1973.

⁶Graduates of the following institutions provided data for inclusion in this study: Arkansas State University, Arkansas Tech University, Harding University, Henderson State University, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, and the University of Central Arkansas.

⁷A scarcity of subjects limited the study since it prevented analyzing responses by school, so the combined data may not accurately reflect the content of any one specific methods course.

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FOOTNOTES

¹Edgar Beaty, "Follow-up of Teacher Education Graduates as a Basis for Institutional Improvement," Peabody Journal of Education, 46 (March, 1969), 298.

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